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Chairman Smith Opening Statement

An Overview of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Budget for Fiscal Year 2018

WASHINGTON - U.S. Rep. Lamar Smith (R-Texas), chairman of the U.S. House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, delivered the following opening statement today at the Space Subcommittee hearing, *An Overview of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Budget for Fiscal Year 2018*. Today's witness is **Mr. Robert Lightfoot, Jr.**, acting administrator, National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

As prepared for delivery:

Thank you, Chairman Babin. And welcome, Acting Administrator Lightfoot. It was good to be with you at Johnson Space Center (JSC) yesterday.

This Committee has consistently demonstrated that U.S. leadership in space is a bipartisan priority. The 2017 NASA Transition Authorization Act, signed into law

in March by President Trump, is a clear demonstration of that.

A key concept in the current NASA Authorization is “continuity of purpose.” Over the years, erratic direction and changes in mission have repeatedly led our space exploration effort astray. This fiscal year 2018 NASA budget shows that Congress and the Administration both support a consistent, focused space program.

The amounts requested in this budget for not only the Space Launch System and Orion crew vehicle but also for the commercial crew and cargo programs reflect this. These requests are much closer to past appropriations and are realistic and reasonable, providing an increased level of stability and continuity of purpose for two of NASA’s main initiatives.

This year’s Authorization Act also declares that NASA’s goals include extending human presence throughout the solar system. Accordingly, NASA continues to focus on Mars as its first interplanetary destination for human exploration. NASA is welcome to conduct missions to intermediate destinations on the way to Mars, such as the Moon, so long as those activities support subsequent journeys to Mars and beyond.

Previews of NASA’s Deep Space Gateway program architecture have given us a peek at NASA’s plans. We look forward to reviewing the Human Exploration Roadmap on how NASA plans to pursue its human space exploration goals in coming decades.

It’s good to see that the NASA budget request ends the previous Administration’s ill-conceived Asteroid Mission. The 2017 NASA Transition Authorization Act clearly reflects the concerns of both Congress and NASA’s Advisory Council about the utility and cost-effectiveness of that mission. Instead, other and more needed technologies will be developed under different programs.

Likewise, within the Science Mission Directorate, the budget promotes a much better balance among NASA’s many scientific endeavors, especially for planetary science.

And it starts to reverse the significant growth in Earth Science. The Obama Administration’s FY 2017 Earth science request was 42 percent higher than its request for planetary science — and that’s 75% higher than the amount requested for Earth Science in 2007.

As a reminder, there are many other federal agencies involved in earth science research, but only one that promotes space exploration. This budget reflects the idea that while NASA can continue to develop state of the art Earth sensing systems, it is not a piggy bank for funding climate activities already addressed elsewhere in the federal government.

The James Webb Space Telescope, which I saw under construction yesterday at JSC, continues on budget and on schedule after NASA and Congress worked to correct for overruns and delays. We continue to expect a launch in October next year.

NASA Science request supports other activities, too. The Transitioning Exoplanet Survey Satellite and the Wide Field Infrared Space Telescope will increase our understanding of exoplanets. I want to emphasize that the recent authorization bill directs NASA to “search for life’s origin, evolution, distribution, and future in the universe.” The James Webb Telescope, Wide Field Telescope, and Exoplanet Survey Satellite will certainly advance this priority.

Congress has the responsibility for setting the top-level direction and missions for NASA and has done so with the 2017 NASA Transition Authorization Act. NASA is responsible for providing a compelling plan and executing it. Now that we have received the budget request, it is Congress’ next responsibility to ensure NASA’s budget is prioritized and funded.

Of all the non-defense, non-security agencies in the federal government, NASA has received the most favorable proposed budget. And I expect that this Committee will continue to support American leadership in space.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

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